

# Ammonius Hermiae, Zacharias Scholasticus and Boethius

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IN HIS *Ammonius*,<sup>1</sup> Zacharias tells us that from Alexandria a young man arrived in Berytus one day to devote himself to the study of jurisprudence. He obviously had been and still was a Christian,<sup>2</sup> but (under the influence of his teacher Ammonius Hermiae, as will become obvious later) had lapsed quietly into what Zacharias calls the Hellenic way of thinking,<sup>3</sup> meaning by this, paganism, and started spreading among his friends false doctrines concerning the origin of the cosmos. On some occasion Zacharias, informed of all this, met the young man and started a conversation, inquiring after a while about Alexandria in general and Ammonius in particular.

He expresses himself about Ammonius in a rather scornful and hostile manner and blames him for perverting truth and thus corrupting his students.<sup>4</sup> What is wrong with Ammonius' doctrines? the young man inquires. Would Zacharias be willing to explain? Yes, Zacharias is willing; and first of all he offers to repeat some conversations which he himself, when in Alexandria, had conducted with Ammonius. The newcomer gladly accepts the offer and now Zacharias repeats four such conversations.

The first (1028A–1060A Migne) is with Ammonius and concerns the problem whether the cosmos had a temporal origin and will come to an end (whether the cosmos is eternal *a parte ante* and *a parte post*). The second (1060A–1105D M) is with the iatrosophist (or the prospective iatrosophist) Gesius<sup>5</sup> and concerns the same problem. The third (1108A–1116B M) is with Ammonius again, mainly on the eternity of the cosmos. The fourth (1116B–1117B M) is also with Ammonius

<sup>1</sup> Migne, PG 85 (Paris 1864) 1011–1144. Cf. Maria E. Colonna, "Zacaria Scolastico. Il suo Ammonio e il Teofrasto di Enea de Gaza," *AnnNapoli* 6 (1956) 107–118, esp. 110–113.

<sup>2</sup> This is not specifically mentioned by Zacharias, but is obvious. The concluding prayer (1104 Migne) is Christian, and the young man obviously joins in it.

<sup>3</sup> ἡρέμα πρὸς Ἑλληνισμὸν ἀποκλίνας (1012 M).

<sup>4</sup> Though less so than about Proclus, whom he calls ἀφιλόσοφος and ἄσοφος (1020A M).

<sup>5</sup> See on him W. Schmid, RE 7 (1910) 1324 s.v. GESSIOS.

and concerns the concept of Trinity. In all four discussions Zacharias proves the superiority of his arguments over those of Ammonius and Gesius. Having finished with this report, Zacharias resumes his conversation with the newcomer, who, of course, concedes (1141A M).

In what follows it will be assumed and shown that Zacharias' report is *essentially* historic; that, in other words, the four discussions have actually taken place; and that Ammonius and Gesius actually and in essence professed the doctrines ascribed to them by Zacharias. This does not mean that the report tells the whole truth; on the contrary, it is so stylized as to make Zacharias' superiority apparent. Still, it contains a large amount of interesting information.

It is well known that the problem whether Plato in the *Timaeus* meant to describe the creation of the cosmos (world order, not world) as a temporal event was discussed in antiquity ever since Aristotle had attributed to Plato such a doctrine, had denied its correctness, attacked it as impious, and asserted the eternity of the cosmos *a parte ante* and *a parte post*. It is furthermore well known that with some exceptions (represented by Plutarch of Chaeronea, Galenus and Atticus) most philosophers, but especially Platonists, denied the correctness of Aristotle's interpretation of the *Timaeus* and professed as Platonic the doctrine of the eternity of the cosmos. Finally, it is well known that this controversy in the fifth and sixth centuries produced a work by Proclus defending the doctrine of the eternity of the cosmos, another by John Philoponus (*De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum*), and still another by Simplicius bitterly attacking Philoponus. The doctrine of the temporal origin of the cosmos (transformed into the doctrine of the temporal origin of the world, not only of world order) became for many one of the landmarks of Christian philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Now, Ammonius was originally a student of Proclus;<sup>7</sup> Simplicius,<sup>8</sup> Gesius, Joh. Philoponus<sup>9</sup> and Zacharias were students of Ammonius (1016A M). Nothing is more natural, therefore, than a discussion between Ammonius and Zacharias on the topic of the eternity of the cosmos. And there is nothing unexpected either in the point of view

<sup>6</sup> Most recent discussion of the problem, also from the systematic point of view: W. Wieland, "Die Ewigkeit der Welt," *Die Gegenwart der Griechen* (Festschrift . . . Gadamer, Tübingen 1960) 291-316.

<sup>7</sup> J. Freudenthal, *RE* 1 (1894) 1863-65 s.v. AMMONIOS 15.

<sup>8</sup> K. Praechter, *RE* 3A (1927) 204-213 s.v. SIMPLICIUS 10.

<sup>9</sup> A. Gudemann, *RE* 9 (1916) 1764-93 s.v. IOANNES 21.

of Ammonius and Gesius or in that of Zacharias, the former two asserting, the latter denying the eternity of the cosmos.<sup>10</sup>

If we now take a look at the arguments and counter-arguments (1037A, 1040A M), we immediately realize that they are strictly philosophical (not “religious,” though in one place Zacharias refers to God and Christ as the authors of his doctrines). Zacharias insists explicitly (1033A–1036A M) that truly pious Christians are not satisfied with faith (*πίστις*) alone; the truth of their convictions they should, can and do prove by irrefragable arguments. Quotations from the Scriptures are few and short (1057A–B M); Plato—and especially his *Timaeus*—is quoted by Zacharias often and at length.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes the quotations from the latter serve to point out Plato’s errors, such as his belief in transmigration (including transmigration of human souls into bodies of brutes) with the attendant doctrine of the pre-existence of souls (1072c M). Sometimes, however, Zacharias quotes Plato approvingly and in order to show that Christians, rather than Ammonius, are true to Plato’s doctrines (1081B M). In other words, all discussions are entirely appropriate to the atmosphere of a class in philosophy.

What is the outcome of the first two discussions, according to Zacharias?

The first discussion, on the occasion of Ammonius’ lecture on Aristotle’s *Physics* (1028A M), ends with a speech by Zacharias, after which the class seems to be dismissed. Zacharias limits himself to the assertion that many of the listeners left, impressed by the Christian arguments. As to Ammonius himself, it is remarkable that at a certain moment he admits that he, to a certain extent, is in sympathy with and impressed by Christian arguments.<sup>12</sup> But Zacharias does not imply that he persuaded Ammonius.

It is a little different with Gesius, introduced to us with the ironical remark that he obviously was convinced that he could defend the case of the eternity of the cosmos better than Ammonius. The conversation—this time it takes place in the Museum rather than in the School—is punctuated by frequent *καλῶς λέγεις* and equivalents from

<sup>10</sup> Additional literature on the school of Alexandria: P. Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness* (The Hague 1963) 56f. On its concept of metaphysics see K. Kremer, *Der Metaphysikbegriff in den Aristoteles-Kommentaren der Ammonius-Schule* (Münster 1961).

<sup>11</sup> 1069c, 1075A, 1081B, 1089A–1092B, 1096A, 1101A M.

<sup>12</sup> *Οὐκ οἶδα ὄντινά μοι τρόπον δοκεῖς εὖ λέγειν· πέπονθα δέ τι περὶ τὸ ὑμέτερον δόξασμα* (1041A M).

Gesius. And at the end Gesius seems to concede: You proved your case.<sup>13</sup>

Again there is no reason to assume that the report is unhistorical. Zacharias introduces Gesius as a physician (an iatrosophist); this agrees with what we know about the man from Damascius (*via* the *Suda*) and from Sophronius.<sup>14</sup> It illustrates nicely the point that it was usual to have one's professional education (medicine; jurisprudence, in the case of Gesius and Zacharias himself) preceded by the study of philosophy.

Now the second discussion with Ammonius. This time the occasion is his lecture on Aristotle's *Ethics* (1108A M). At some point Ammonius must have asserted that there is no contradiction between Plato and Aristotle—and this gives Zacharias a chance to object and to insist that Aristotle rejects Plato's theory of ideas and also otherwise disagrees with him. But from this, we don't know how, Ammonius returns to the topic of the eternity of the cosmos and—as if nothing had happened, says Zacharias—repeats his assertion that the cosmos is eternal. Zacharias begins to contradict—more sharply this time, as he says. Ammonius remains silent, and after a while orders his students to leave, obviously afraid Zacharias would convince them, so Zacharias tells us.

A strange statement. One is tempted to assume that at a certain point Ammonius simply said that the time for which the class was scheduled is over and gave everybody permission to leave, of which permission many availed themselves. But he also said that he is ready to continue his discussion with Zacharias, and anybody who wished could stay. In any case, when Zacharias continues, Ammonius concedes, tries a comeback, and finally gives up and declares himself convinced (1113B, 1116B M).

It is probably here where doubts concerning the historicity of Zacharias' account will be strongest. However, one thing seems pretty certain. It is difficult to imagine that Ammonius committed himself to the doctrine of the eternity of the cosmos in writing; otherwise Zacharias would have exposed himself to a very easy refutation of the credibility of his report.

But the essential historicity of this part of his report is guaranteed

<sup>13</sup> 1069c, 1081A,C, 1092c, 1093B, 1097D, 1104c M.

<sup>14</sup> Damascius, *Vita Isidori*, ed. C. Zintzen (Hildesheim 1967) frgg. 335–337. On Sophronius see n.38.

also by the rather circumstantial way in which the topic of the eternity of the cosmos is reintroduced. Obviously without any logical connection this topic was preceded by another: the problem of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle. One can suspect Zacharias of apologetic tendencies with regard to the problem of eternity, but one can hardly do so with regard to the problem of harmony. As Zacharias is by no means favorably disposed toward Plato or Aristotle, his insistence on their difference is dictated by purely academic reasons.

Now let us be reminded: if Ammonius changed his opinion and accepted the doctrine of the temporal origin of the cosmos, he could have done so regardless of any Christian implications on his part. The name of Atticus at least reminds us that indeed there were Platonists who insisted that Plato ascribed temporal origin to the cosmos and who failed to be impressed by Aristotle's criticism of such a theory. Indeed, Atticus denied the possibility of reconciling Plato with Aristotle, stressed that Aristotle rejected Plato's ideas and, as we said, assumed the temporal origin of the cosmos.<sup>15</sup> Even if Ammonius had yielded to Zacharias on all these points, he would simply have exchanged one Platonic position for another.

Of course, we cannot be sure that Ammonius appreciated Atticus. But one thing is certain. Atticus was not forgotten in the fifth and sixth centuries. He is quoted with approval on the very topic of the temporal origin of the world by Zacharias' well known ally, Aeneas of Gaza.<sup>16</sup>

If we assume the historicity of Zacharias' *Ammonius*, he tells us some interesting details concerning the instruction in the school of Alexandria: lectures interrupted by questions and objections from the floor, and subsequent discussion. This is essentially the impression we receive from Porphyry's description of the teaching methods of Plotinus (*V. Plotini* 13).

And it is certainly characteristic of the spirit of Ammonius' school that Zacharias' young man declares Aristotle rather than Plato to be his favorite philosopher (1017A M). On the whole, the Athenian school treated Aristotle's philosophy as a mere preliminary to that of Plato; in Alexandria Aristotle's stock stood much higher.

<sup>15</sup> Atticus in Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 15.5.13. Also Simplicius (*In categorias*, CAG VIII [1907] Index) is familiar with him.

<sup>16</sup> Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus*, p.46.16 Colonna.

Let us interrupt here. From Brandt and Patch,<sup>17</sup> but especially from Courcelle,<sup>18</sup> we have learned to pay attention to the relations between Ammonius and Boethius. That the latter made full use of some of the former's writings Courcelle established beyond any doubt. His further thesis that Boethius studied in Alexandria under Ammonius has not met with general approval;<sup>19</sup> but this problem does not concern us here. Let us rather turn to some aspects of the *Consolatio* by Boethius.

It seems that the famous problem concerning the Christian or non-Christian character of the *Consolatio* loses much of its difficulty if we see it against the background of instruction in the Alexandrian school. Let us concentrate on the eternity of the cosmos. Ammonius first asserts that the cosmos is eternal; Zacharias asserts the opposite. Both assertions are "Platonic," i.e., have been professed by Platonists quite regardless of any doctrines of Christianity. Where does Boethius stand? It can safely be said: closer to Ammonius than to Zacharias. True, as he sees it, the cosmos is not coeternal with God, because eternity means a condition of being exempt from time, whereas Zacharias time and again objects precisely to the term *συναίδιος*. But though the cosmos exists in time, there is no beginning or end to its existence: though not *aeternus*, the cosmos is *sempiternus*.<sup>20</sup> It is obvious that this position would be much more acceptable to Ammonius than to Zacharias. To the latter the doctrine of the *sempiternitas* of the cosmos would obviously be as unacceptable as that of its *aeternitas*. This is especially clear if we think of the end of the cosmos rather than its beginning.

<sup>17</sup> H. R. Patch, "Necessity in Boethius and the Neoplatonists," *Speculum* 10 (1935) 393–404, esp. 401 n.3.

<sup>18</sup> P. Courcelle, *Les lettres grecques en Occident*<sup>2</sup> (Paris 1948) 268–299, with references to S. Brandt, "Entstehungszeit und zeitliche Folge der Werke von Boethius," *Philologus* 62 (1903) 141–154, 234–275; *idem*, "Boèce et l'école d'Alexandrie," *Mélanges* 52 (1935) 185–223.

However, we should not exaggerate the extent to which Boethius relies on Ammonius alone. In *De Trinitate* 2 he divides theoretical philosophy exactly as Ammonius and his whole school do, viz. into metaphysics, *mathematics* and physics. But in his *In Porph. Isagogen* mathematics is replaced by 'psychology' plus astronomy (CSEL 48 [1906] pp.8.21–9.12 Brandt). On the significance of this alternative see P. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*<sup>2</sup> (The Hague 1960) 82f.

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., L. Minio-Paluello, "Boethius," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 3 (1967) 842–43.

<sup>20</sup> *Consolatio* 5 pr 6.15–55 ed. Rand-Stewart (LCL, London 1926). Cf. Procl. *In Tim.* I (Leipzig 1903) pp.278.3–279.29 Diehl, who also distinguishes the *ἀιδιότης* of the cosmos from *αἰώνιον* of God, as does Simpl. *In Phys.* (CAG IX, X [1882]) 1154.29–1155.14 Diels. Cf. Courcelle, "Boèce . . ." (*supra* n.18) 214–218.

Now Boethius has inserted his *aeternitas-sempiternitas* distinction into a discussion of a completely different topic: that of the reconcilability of divine providence with free will.<sup>21</sup> As is well known, Boethius bases his assertion that the two are reconcilable on the distinction between divine knowledge of future *contingentia* and man's knowledge of them. Because God exists in eternity, his knowledge transcends any kind of temporal knowledge and He sees all things as an everpresent now. He does not 'foresee' things which will happen in the future; we really should not speak of his *praevidentia* but strictly of his *providentia*. And on the basis of this distinction Boethius asserts that God does not see *futura contingentia* the way we do ("it may happen or not"), *i.e.*, he does not have an opinion (obviously: *δόξα* or an *εικάζειν* or *ἀμφίβολουσ γνώσις*) concerning them. He, with full insight, *knows* what will happen and at the same time knows that there is no necessity that it should happen the way he knows it will happen. Future events referred to divine knowledge are necessary; but without this reference they are free. This double aspect Boethius illustrates by another: one and the same thing as cognized by human senses is a particular, but as cognized by reason (*νοῦς*) is a universal. Divine knowledge is as different from human as man's noetic knowledge is from sensual.

This whole problem was also discussed by Ammonius in his commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, especially its famous ch. 9.<sup>22</sup> Ammonius also asserts that divine providence and free will are not incompatible; and he also denies that divine knowledge of *futura contingentia* is in any way 'eikastik' or *ἀόριστος* (as ours is). He also illustrates his point by contrasting with human knowledge the knowledge which animals have, *viz.* sensual knowledge of particulars without any knowledge of universals (and intelligibles). Divine knowledge, however, is superior to human, so that the gods know *ᾠρισμένως* even *τὸ ἀόριστον*. Thus both horns of a dilemma are avoided. If gods know *τὸ ἀόριστον* as *ἀόριστον*, *i.e.*, if they have only an *ἀμφίβολουσ γνώσις*, we should not call them omniscient; if they know the *ἐκβασίς τῶν ἐνδεχομένων*, then things must happen the way they do,

<sup>21</sup> The topic to which all of *Consolatio 5* is devoted.

<sup>22</sup> Ammon. *In De Interpr.* ed. R. Busse (CAG IV.5 [1897]), esp. pp.132.11–13; 133.31–134.7; 133.26–31. Ammonius refers to Iamblichus, p.135.12. It is worthwhile to read the irritated reaction of Zeller: E. Zeller/R. Mondolfo, *La filosofia dei Greci*, Pt. III vol. VI, ed. by G. Martano (Firenze 1961) 25 n.67. Similar passages in Proclus enumerated *ibid.* pp.146f (German original: III.2<sup>5</sup> [Leipzig 1923] 757, 857).

and there is no free will. The formula—they know τὸ ἀόριστον ὠρισμένως—solves the problem.

The similarity between Ammonius and Boethius is obvious. In fact, the texts elucidate one another. Ammonius uses the term τὸ ἀόριστον; Boethius gives us the classic example: Teiresias, who (as Horace, *Sat.* 2.5.59 has it) tells Odysseus that he and his crew either will or will not kill Helios' sacred bulls.

True, the solutions of Ammonius and Boethius go back to Iamblichus. It is he, so it seems, who said that gods know temporal things atemporally, that which is divided in an undivided manner. From Iamblichus they were taken over by Proclus. Thus the similarity between Ammonius and Boethius may be attributable to a common source. But this problem is not of immediate interest to us.<sup>23</sup> What does interest us is simply the similarity between Ammonius and Boethius concerning both the doctrine of the eternity of the cosmos (despite some difference) and divine providence of *futura contingentia*.

And this fits very well into other 'theological' doctrines of the school of Alexandria.

If we rely on Zacharias, we shall have to admit that Ammonius either did not profess the doctrine of a god above the Demiurge, *i.e.* Plotinus' One, or at least gave it scant attention. As to the nature of God there seems to be no difference at all between Ammonius and Zacharias. Furthermore, everything said about Him either by the former or by the latter is entirely compatible with the section of Simplicius' commentary on the *Encheiridion* by Epictetus. That this section can be used to prove the un-Plotinian character of the Platonism as taught by Ammonius has been asserted by Praechter;<sup>24</sup> but since he was accused of misreading that text,<sup>25</sup> it seems indispensable to reassert Praechter's thesis.

There is no trace of Simplicius' assuming a deity above the demiurge. He calls him—not any other deity—πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν ἓν, meaning by this only that in him the εἶδη are completely united. He attributes to him γνώσις ἀκροτάτη; he προνοεῖ καὶ διοικεῖ τὸ ὅλον. Following the well-known discussion in Plato's *Nomoi* he proves that gods exist, that

<sup>23</sup> On this whole section cf. Courcelle, *Les lettres grecques* (*supra* n.18) 291–298.

<sup>24</sup> *Op.cit.* (*supra* n.8) 206–208, 212.

<sup>25</sup> A. C. Lloyd in A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (London 1967) 316.



they exercise providence and that they cannot be bribed.<sup>26</sup> All this is clearly non-Plotinian.

It is perhaps worthwhile to mention, in this context, that the Epictetus commentary was written by Simplicius before he wrote his commentary on *De caelo*. For in the Epictetus commentary he assumes the existence of eight celestial spheres only; whereas in *De caelo* he tells us that after having witnessed certain astronomical observations of Ammonius, he came to the conclusion that there must be one more sphere, a starless one, the ninth, surrounding the eighth and imparting a certain motion to it.<sup>27</sup> Everybody knows this sphere from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Paradise* xxvii)<sup>28</sup> with its system of ten spheres, the ninth being the *primum mobile*. It is difficult to assume that it was only Simplicius who arrived at this conclusion rather than the original observer, Ammonius. He, then, would deserve to be credited with a significant contribution to the mediaeval picture of the cosmos.

It is this un-Plotinian idea of God as creator and omniscient provider which Boethius shares with Ammonius. We should not forget that according to Ammonius, Aristotle's god was also efficient cause<sup>29</sup>—in other words, Ammonius tried to reconcile the Platonic concept of the Demiurge with the Aristotelian concept of the Unmoved Mover.

And now let us resume our analysis of Zacharias' *Ammonius*.

Ammonius obviously did not mind Zacharias' criticisms. As the latter presents it, Ammonius on some unspecified occasion asked him to explain to him the doctrine of Trinity. And after Zacharias has done so, Ammonius gives a kind of summary in the words: *ταῖς μὲν ὑποστάσεσι καὶ τῷ ἀριθμῷ τρία ταῦτά γε, τῇ δὲ οὐσίᾳ ἓν*. Thereupon, so Zacharias tells us, the *σύλλογος* starts applauding in recognition of the fact that it was a good summary. As Zacharias presents it (1117B M), Ammonius smiles ironically, blushes—and then turns to another topic.

Again it does not seem difficult to assume that the report is essentially historic. Ammonius is not presented as having become con-

<sup>26</sup> In *Epicteti Encheiridion*, ed. Dübner, pp.100–102.

<sup>27</sup> *Simpl. In Cael.* p.462.20–31 Heiberg (CAG VII [1894]); In *Epicteti Ench.*, p.100.13 Dübner. Cf. P. Duhem, *Le Système du monde* (Paris 1914) 202–204.

<sup>28</sup> We cannot undertake here to determine the difference between the qualities ascribed to the *primum mobile* by Dante (or his authorities) and by Ammonius-Simplicius, nor the relation between Ammonius-Simplicius and Ptolemy.

<sup>29</sup> Praechter, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.8) 211.

verted; he is presented as somebody who understands the doctrine of Trinity. Furthermore, why would Zacharias give credit to Ammonius for coining a formula well expressing the doctrine of Trinity, unless Ammonius actually did it—though without committing himself to that doctrine? Thus, when Boethius wrote his theological treatises concerning this doctrine, he did not have to feel very far remote from Ammonius. And, of course, the passage most succinctly illustrates the give and take, even on specifically Christian doctrines, of Christians and pagans attending the lectures of Ammonius.

In *Contra Eutychen*, Boethius explicitly designates his *persona* as equivalent to *ὑπόστασις*, and declares *dicimus unam esse οὐσίαν vel οὐσίωσιν, id est essentiam vel subsistentiam deitatis, sed tres ὑποστάσεις, id est tres substantias*.<sup>30</sup> In *Utrum pater* (p.36.55 R.–St.) we read a slight variant, *trinitas . . . in personarum pluralitate consistit, unitas vero in substantiae simplicitate*. There is hardly reason to be surprised by the similarity of the formula in Boethius and in Zacharias; but that Zacharias explicitly attributes the formula *ὑποστάσει τρία, οὐσία ἓν* to Ammonius is remarkable. The theological language of Boethius would immediately have been understood in Ammonius' classes—and Ammonius deserves a place in the history of Christian dogma. When Boethius continues and says, *et quidem secundum hunc modum dixere unam trinitatis essentiam, tres substantias tresque personas*,<sup>31</sup> we are entitled to include Ammonius among the subjects of *dixere*, even if he himself did not subscribe to the formula.

All this does not mean to deny that a chasm separates the world of the *Consolatio* from that of the theological treatises, despite Ammonius' presence in either of them. It is impossible to reconcile *De fide catholica* (p.70.266 R.–St.) implying belief in *finis mundi* (destructibility of the cosmos), with *Consolatio* 5 pr 6.58, *Platonem sequentes . . . mundum . . . dicemus esse perpetuum* (thus, indestructible). And how can we reconcile the history of mankind presented strictly along OT and NT lines (fall, necessity of redemption, Christ the redeemer) in *De fide*<sup>32</sup> with the *Consolatio*,<sup>33</sup> which simply takes over the golden-age pattern from Ovid, praises the *nimum felix prior aetas* and wishes *utinam nostra tempora redirent in priscos mores?*

<sup>30</sup> *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3, pp.84.5 and 90.91 Rand-Stewart.

<sup>31</sup> *Contra Eutychen* 3, p.90.94 R.–St.

<sup>32</sup> *De fide catholica* 58.97–68.242 R.–St.

<sup>33</sup> *Consol.* 2 m 5, pp.204f R.–St.

It is well known that many interpretations have been offered to explain the contradiction between Boethius' Christianity and the spirit of the *Consolatio*.<sup>34</sup> Shouldn't we revive the simplest one: that Boethius lapsed or slipped away from Christianity? Lapse and slipping do not mean renunciation; and in all likelihood Boethius, when asked in prison, would have answered the question whether he was a Christian in the affirmative. But can we be sure as to how he would have answered the questions what Christianity meant to him or what he would have considered its main tenets? Lapsing or slipping away from Christianity (be it repeated: it is lapse, not renunciation, least of all formal renunciation, which is suggested here) in the sixth century might be considered unlikely by some historians. All the more useful is it to be reminded of the presupposition of Zacharias' *Ammonius*: a Christian who under the influence of Ammonius is characterized by Zacharias as ἡρέμα πρὸς Ἑλληνισμὸν ἀποκλίνας.<sup>35</sup> This phrase seems exactly to fit Boethius, the author of the *Consolatio*. The *Consolatio* is written by a disciple of Ammonius rather than by a disciple of the Apostles. And to familiarize oneself with the spirit of his school a study of Zacharias' *Ammonius* is most helpful—despite the fact that it was written to belittle Ammonius—if read as it should be, *viz.* as essentially a historical document.<sup>36</sup> If in addition we remind ourselves that Ammonius Hermiae in all likelihood became a Christian<sup>37</sup> (*i.e.* was baptized) and that Gesius became another<sup>38</sup>—whatever their motives and whatever their subsequent conduct in life and in teaching—this also should help us to see in proper perspective the possibility that Boethius did indeed lapse from Christianity.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Courcelle, *Les lettres grecques* (*supra* n.18) 300–304. I cannot quite agree with him on the easy reconcilability of the Christian with the pagan elements in the *Consolatio*, much as I am indebted to him otherwise.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. n.2 above.

<sup>36</sup> Full use of it is made by Courcelle, *Les lettres grecques* (*supra* n.18) 296–298.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. L. G. Westerink, ed. *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam 1962) pp. xii ff. However, Westerink is obviously skeptical with regard to the historicity of Zacharias' *Ammonius*, as is also, to a certain extent, Maria Colonna.

<sup>38</sup> Sophronius, *Narratio miraculorum SS. Cyri et Ioannis*, ch. 30 (PG 87/3, 3514c–3520d, esp. 3514d M). Had E. Évrard considered this text, he wouldn't have criticized Courcelle as he did in "Jean Philopon . . . et ses rapports avec Ammonius . . .," REG 78 (1965) 592–598, esp. 598.